

'Friends' there to aid in everyday tasks

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TORONTO—Most of us never think twice about the strength or mobility it takes to do simple, everyday things such as turning a doorknob or opening a jar. But for elderly people, or people affected by diseases or disorders which limit movement, mobility or strength, everyday activities become genuine challenges.

Now, simple products and devices to help people perform those common tasks and make their lives a little easier are available through a mail order catalogue.

Friends Mail Order is an eight-page catalogue chock full of products designed for easy use by people with decreased strength, mobility or balance. From the comfort and privacy of their own homes, customers can browse through the items and order anything from a pill box opener to a bath seat.

The mail order service was started by Karen Lilja as a resource for people with Parkinson's disease in 1993. When the People with Parkinson's newsletter, which regularly featured the items, lost its funding, Ms. Lilja decided that the products should continue to be easily available through mail order.

"I went away and read on Parkinson's and realized there were a lot of items that were great but you couldn't get your

hands on them. And people who would have to spend hours on the phone trying to get one item would probably give up on the second or third try," she said.

Using her own money and enlisting the help of numerous family and friends, Ms. Lilja put together eight pages of

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innovative and affordable items to make everyday activities easier for people whose physical functioning has been affected by an illness or age.

Some of the products featured in the catalogue include the Boston Hoop which helps people with limited movement or motor control wash their backs and other hard-to-reach areas of the body; the pill box timer which automatically lets people know when it's time to take their medication; specially-designed cutlery with large, cushioned handles for people with limited hand control; a universal turner for water taps, door handles/locks and other things for people with reduced



strength in their hands and arms; a mighty grip jar opener which fastens under shelves or cupboards; and a lightweight plastic rod with a suction cup on one end which people can use to remove or replace light bulbs while sitting or standing.

The most popular items so far are a specially designed, easy-to-grip pen and the door-widening hinges.

"They swing out and away from the door opening so it

M4E 3A8. Inside, customers will find an order form and a handy index which lists products under the following headings: Communication, Therapy and Exercise, Dressing, Household, Recreation, Bath/Medical, Kitchen and Dining, Reachers and Mobility.

Many of the products are Canadian-made and all are guaranteed. As part of its commitment to helping people with various illnesses and

allows another two inches of clearance. You can get a wheelchair through the doorway or a walker," said Ms. Lilja. "So for \$34.99 you can change your door hinges as opposed to doing major renovations."

The catalogue can be obtained by sending \$1 for postage to Friends Mail Order, 45 Osborne Ave.,

Toronto, ON,

conditions, Friends Mail Order is donating 5 per cent of each sale to the medical research charity of the customer's choice.

The products in the catalogue have all been found by Ms. Lilja or have been brought to her attention by friends or customers. Product ideas from customers are welcome and if someone needs something that isn't in the catalogue, Ms. Lilja will try to locate it for them.

"I look continually, anywhere and everywhere. And every now and then, I'll have people come to me with great products. Or else customers will come to me and say 'You really should look at this.' I'm allowing the customers to figure out what the assortment will be."

That service is an important one because many of the products which could benefit people the most were not available to or easily located by consumers, Ms. Lilja said.

"If somebody was going to go out and find the type of items that I sell, they might be able to find it at hospital supply stores but a lot of the items they're not going to be able to," she said. "They might be able to find it though their OT (occupational therapist) but somebody in a rural area who doesn't have an OT and doesn't have access to a type of hospital supply store is not going to find these types of items."

THE FORMULA FOR QUALITY IN MAGNETIC IMAGING: